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MEMORANDUM

NOTE DE SERVICE

TO/A: See list below

DATE: December 30, 1974

FROM/DE: Wendy Dobson

SUBJECT/SUJET: Women and Rural Development

Attached is a brief summary of a recent seminar in which I participated, entitled "Prospects for Growth in Rural Societies: With or Without Active Participation of Women". The seminar provided a very useful opportunity to define some of the issues surrounding a sometimes controversial subject, and the report will be of interest to you. The most useful document from the seminar is available in the library: "A Strategy Paper for Integrating LDC Rural Women into their National Economies", van Haeften, R.K., and Caton, D.D., AID, May 1974.

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Rural Societies and Participation of Women

1. On December 2 - 4, 1974, some 30* men and women from developing nations and from aid agencies met in Princeton, New Jersey to try to define what is known about the economic role of rural women in a number of countries, and to develop a clearer idea of how this role is affected by socio-economic change.

2. The following is a summary and assessment of the discussions in which a number of questions were usefully addressed which will undoubtedly arise again during 1975, International Women's Year. Discussions sought to define the broad spectrum of women's activities, including homemaker, mother, producer of goods and services, marketing agent, consumer and household and farm decision-maker; and to define the resources available to her to increase her productivity.

3. The first day and a half of the meeting was devoted to a series of case studies presented by the country participants, each followed by a general discussion. Half a day was devoted to methodological questions relating to attempts to measure the relative economic contribution of women. The third day was spent in two smaller groups defining research agendas and identifying policy questions arising in earlier discussions.

4. Why women? Existing research and analysis often focusses on the issue of role equality between men and women, subscribing to the idea that women's roles are inferior, and ignoring the substantial economic roles they do play. The seminar discussion concentrated on the economic question and did not enter into socio-cultural questions, where considerable discrimination does exist.

*See Appendix A for list of participants. Meeting was sponsored by Agricultural Development Council and organized by A. Weisblat, Director, Research and Training Network.

Three major reasons for differential interest in women emerged: 1) Social and economic equality of men and women is a desirable development goal to be pursued in and of itself; 2) Women constitute 50% of the rural population and therefore a valuable, possibly under-productive source of economic growth and development. Women's roles in households and in the economy have important external consequences for the health, education, productivity and size of future generations; 3) Women are relatively more important agents of change in fertility behaviour than men.

5. Who is the rural woman? This question needs much more study as is evident in the research agenda in para. 7 below. It was not sufficiently addressed in the case studies. What came through clearly however, is that most descriptions of the rural woman are in welfare terms relating to her definition as wife and mother. Not enough attention is paid to her as a productive agent within the household and in the economy: as household treasurer, joint farm decision-maker, supply of farm as well as household labor, trader, marketer, and consumer. Described in these terms, she is over-worked. But because she performs much of her tasks in the home, she does not participate as fully as her husband in the wider economy, her tasks have been ascribed low status. Hence, she has little in the way of resources to draw upon to decrease her burdens, increase her skills and productivity, or to improve her health.

6. What is the problem? It was evident that definition of the problem varies by socio-economic level. For middle and upper class women in developing nations, as in the West, social and economic equality in household and marketplace is desired especially by those women who choose to work outside the home. In the subsistence sector however, the problem is poverty. Several of the case studies observed how rural men and women are equal in their poverty. The problem for women arises in the differential application of programs to raise productivity

and incomes. These are usually aimed only at men, because women are not defined as productive agents. The cause of the differential perception is not entirely clear; but seems to be a combination of misperceptions by program planners, aided by cultural customs and practices which maintain male dominance.

Possible contradictions between goals of rural development and improvement of the status of rural women were noted: rural development strategies may make these women less equal and increase their physical burdens: as men compete for new income-generating activities, such as cash cropping, food crop production may be left to the women, in addition to the household and family activities.

It was also noted that wage-sex differentials in agricultural labor have occurred in India: female labor, which is relatively cheaper, is being substituted for male labor, with the result that men are becoming increasingly under-employed while women are working harder. The problem in the rural areas may be rather neatly summarized: "Let us also talk of 'the farmer, she....'; let us talk of lightening her physical burdens, having fewer, better spaced children, increasing the productivity of her labor, improving her health and nutrition...." Programs aimed at her should include farm credit, saving, investment, marketing, production information on livestock, food grains, as well as health and nutrition programs.

Case studies from Tanzania and the middle east underlined a relatively greater importance of cultural and religious barriers to female participation in agriculture than was found in West Africa or Asia. In Tanzania, men dispose of all cash proceeds although there is some interesting evidence of change in distributional arrangements to male and female members of the new villages. In the Middle East, a study of census data on female labor force participation indicated a serious under-reporting of such activity.

7. Research Agenda: The following is a set of research priorities and questions put together by those participants with research experience:

- a) Studies on how the rural woman allocates all her time, particularly in peak agricultural seasons, differentiated by socio-economic level (to help answer question "who is she?")
- b) Studies of marketing arrangements available to women in the rural setting;
- c) Studies of the information inputs (formal and informal) available to the rural woman;
- d) Extent of alternative economic opportunities available to the rural woman,
- e) How does the rural women use her earnings? If she earns, does she control them?
- f) Studies of household chores of rural women (perhaps overlaps with (a));
- g) Evaluation of different training programs on the rural woman: what training facilities are available in the village; to what extent does formal schooling emphasize differences in sex roles?
- h) What effects do production incentives have on the dynamics of family organization?
- i) Studies of relative availability (and real cost?) of rural credit to rural women.
- j) Studies of the changes in the activities of rural women as a consequence of changes in agricultural technologies.
- k) A systematic comparison of 1960 and 1970 census data with a view to analyzing the definition of the economic role of women; objective of the exercise to sensitize ILO of the need to standardize the definition of the economic role of rural women.

As it was not the purpose of the meeting to define research projects etc., no further action was taken at the time on this agenda.

8. Policy Implications: One of the impressive aspects of this discussion was a general poverty of information and experience with ways to deal with women in particular; partly because the problem is really one of rural poverty which hasn't exactly been solved yet, but also because most of the participants with relevant experience have been associated primarily with welfare programs. Recommendations included:

- a) The objective of interest in rural women should be to raise the productivity of the labor and improve the living conditions of poor rural women.
- b) To do this, more information on the determinants of their current productivity and living conditions is needed, and ways to release the major constraints.
- c) Major constraints identified overlap, of course, with those that generally keep rural people poor:
 - lack of appropriate low income institutions and less costly expertise to work with the poor;
 - barriers to education;
 - inadequate packages of technological inputs to agriculture;
 - inadequate marketing mechanisms, pricing policies, etc.
- d) Measures directed at rural women might include i) improved (and appropriate) household technologies to relieve physical burdens ii) new forms of schooling for women (vs. measures to reduce sex differentiation in existing schooling) iii) legislation and public information aimed at changing social perceptions of female status iv) adult education for women in accounting skills, etc.

9. Implications for IDRC: There is much attention being paid to women. . . as a special concern by AID and the UN. The best paper defining the attributes of the problem of the rural woman has been done for AID and is available in IDRC Library.

- a) IDRC Divisions should review rural development-oriented projects with a view to determining the extent to which we too ignore the productive roles of women. We are engaged in assisting in the build up of research capabilities, and in a number of substantive areas, seek solutions to rural problems. Are the opportunities afforded equally accessible to qualified women? Should we engage in "affirmative action" and encourage fuller participation by women - both as producers of research, and as recipients in action programs.
- b) We need to know who the poor rural woman is, just as we have worried much about her husband, the peasant. Time allocation studies (what she does and how she does it) are needed. These should probably be carried out as studies of the entire household, to include information on children's contributions to production also. IDRC could look into research possibilities in connection with PHS and SSHR activities. Jean Steckle is already associated with such research. In addition to understanding better who she is, more needs to be understood about the resources available to her and ways to release constraints to increase her productivity. Such information is essential to intelligent policy-making. How can we talk about female labor force participation as a fertility determinant when we don't understand what those females already do? Should we really be more interested in raising the productivity of the labor they already provide? As incomes (that they control?) rise,

more opportunities open up, tastes and preferences change including family size desires.

- c) We can contribute to better definition of the issues recognizing socio-economic differentials, and recognizing the problem of asset inequality: let us think about "the farmer, she...", and consider the possibilities of directing information in her direction. Cultural barriers may be encountered, but is that sufficient reason to deny achievement of human potential, and fuller use of human resources?

APPENDIX A

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